

II. SETTING AND HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF HAMILTON

The Town of Hamilton is situated in the valley of western Loudoun County. The Town is eight miles west of the County seat of Leesburg and forty miles west of Washington D.C. Hamilton is the most eastern of the six Towns in western Loudoun. Historically, Hamilton was the largest of those western Towns. However, during the last several decades, it has evolved into a predominantly residential community and has not expanded its borders to take in the substantial development that has occurred adjacent to it.

Hamilton is bisected by business Route 7, currently and historically one of two major east-west roads through western Loudoun, the other being Route 50 through Middleburg. The watershed divide that separates the two major drainage basins of western Loudoun, the Catoctin and Goose Creek watersheds also bisects Hamilton.

The land within and around the original Town had good soils, good topography for farming, and good supplies of groundwater, which made it an attractive place for settlement and continued development in an agricultural-based economy.

The area that presently includes the Town of Hamilton was originally populated by a variety of Native American tribes. European settlers arrived in the late 1730s. George and Tabitha Tavenner were the first to build a house in the Hamilton area in 1768. Later, their son Richard built *Harmony*, a log and stone house where every nail was made by the blacksmith. The area was known as *Harmony*.

In 1831 the Leesburg and Snickers Gap Turnpike Company opened a road connecting Leesburg to Snickersville (now Bluemont). The road facilitated trade and growth in the area. By 1833, there were enough people to support the first church, Harmony Methodist Church. The community was known as *Harmony* as well as *Hamilton Store*, until 1835 when John Quincy Adams approved a post office in Charles Bennett Hamilton's store. The name of the town was recorded as Hamilton. Continued population growth led to incorporation as the Town of Hamilton in 1875.

On March 21, 1865, Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby and some of his men surprised and engaged a group of Union soldiers commanded by Colonel Marcus Reno, in a skirmish known as the Harmony Skirmish. Many of the Union wounded were cared for by families who lived in Hamilton. The Harmony Skirmish was the last important action of the Civil War in Loudoun County.



Stonegate

After the Civil War, in 1868, the railroad had reached Hamilton and western Loudoun, furthering the growth of the area. Hamilton, along with its neighboring towns to the west, prospered as not only the major agricultural center of the area, but also a popular resort area for tourists and vacationers. The air and water were clean and temperatures were cool, and many Washington D.C. families came to stay for the summer. Six trains a day from Washington providing four “mails” and the availability of fresh food from the neighboring farms, made Hamilton an ideal place for families wishing relief from the city’s summer heat and diseases. A mile and a half long boardwalk through town “afforded delightful opportunity to stroll,” and a dance hall at the west end of town provided an evening social gathering place.

In 1860, the Town had a total population of 148 people, but by 1890, it had grown to 407 residents, making it the third largest Town in Loudoun County. By 1900, Hamilton had become the county’s second largest Town, having surpassed Middleburg in population. Today, because the Town limits have not been extended, the population is under 600.

In the early days of the 20th century, Hamilton had many businesses, including two newspapers, a milliner, men’s clothing stores, a butcher shop, a broom factory, a dentist, a stove shop, two hardware stores, boarding houses, livery stable and blacksmith, among others. There was also a flat racecourse. Hamilton was a major center of economic and cultural activity for western Loudoun residents during this period.

However, a decline in economic activity in the Town began in the early 1900s as competition increased from the neighboring Town of Purcellville and the greater use of automobiles limited the benefits of the train for tourist traffic. A critical blow to the Town’s economic fortunes was caused by the fire of 1926 that destroyed much of the center of town including six stores, the post office, and four houses.

Since that time, the Town has become more of a residential community than a business community. Population growth has continued, however, along with the growth of the rest of the county. This growth has occurred not only within the Town boundaries, but also significantly around the edges of the Town, resulting in the majority of the area’s population living outside of the incorporated Town. This development pattern presents both the Town and the County with significant land use and public service issues that are addressed in this Plan.

Hamilton has gained in popularity as a good place to live and raise a family, as it has become more accessible to the employment centers of Fairfax, eastern Loudoun, the Dulles corridor, and Leesburg. Many of the features that caused Hamilton to grow and prosper during the 19th century are factors in its current growth pattern and will likely continue to be factors into the future. Good soils, good topography, and proximity to eastern urban areas all create opportunities as well as pressures from continued population growth.